Newsletter for Birdwatchers

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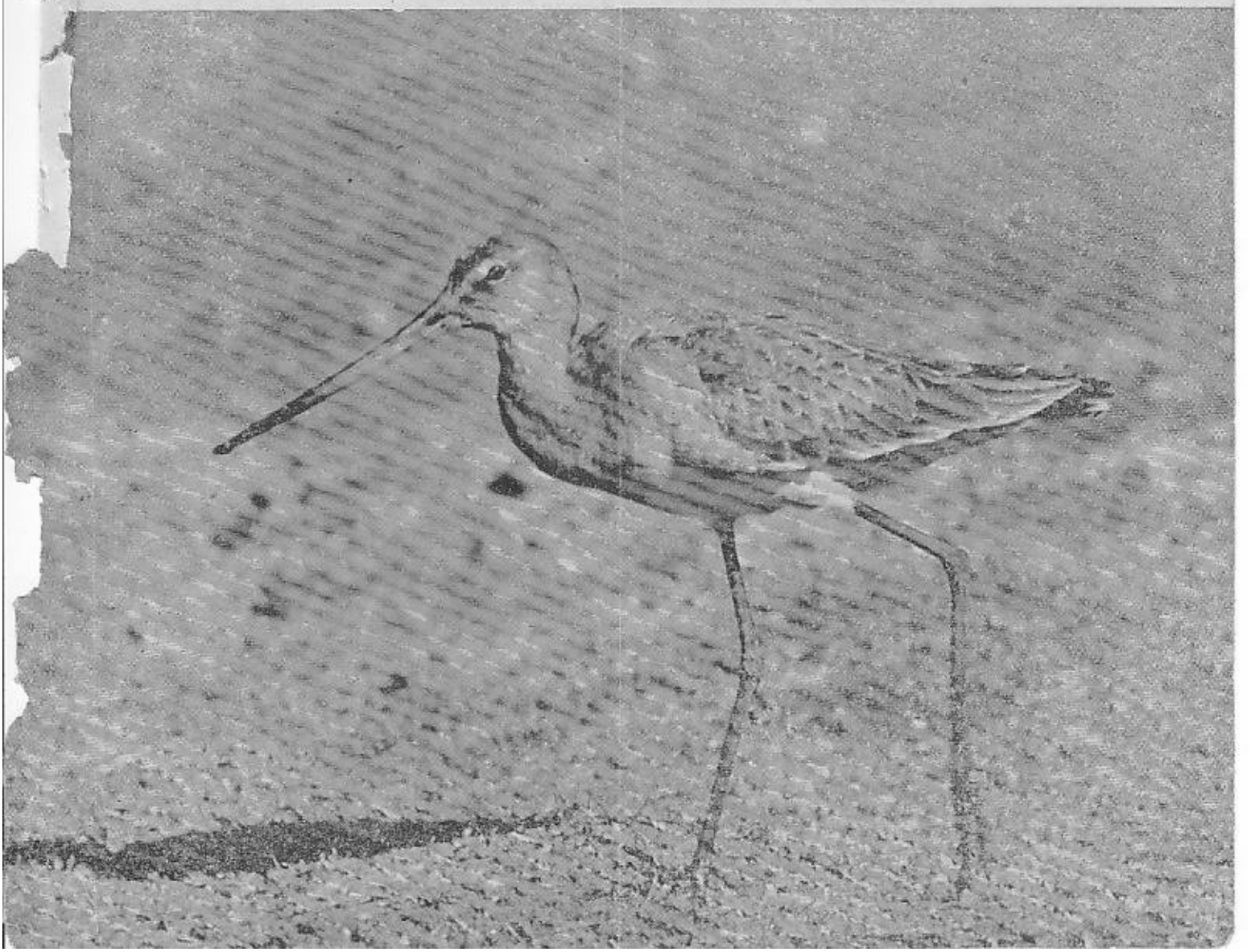

N E W S L E T T E R

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scanty scrub country. They are greatly disturbed by cattle and he suggests that these areas be made into sanctuaries. Sharma also says that both the common and imperial sand grouse are poached by hunters around tanks in the desert and these areas need much more portection.

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Of Drongos: The change in the scientific names of birds causes confusion and the second addition of Indian Hill Birds published in 1979 carries the old names of Drongos. For example, Dissemurus paradiseus instead of the newer version Dicrurus paradiseus for the Greater Racket-Tailed Drongo. However, now all the eight species of Drongos found in India have been placed in the Family Dicruridae, and I find that six of them are found in the Western Ghats. These are: The Grey drongo, the black drongo, the bronzed drongo, the white bellied drongo, the racket-tailed drongo, and the hair crested drongo. Has any one seen all or most of these in the same area ?

A close study of the Spotted Dove by S. Ashok Kumar,IAS., H.No.10-3-283/5, Humayun Nagar, Hyderabad-500 028: For nearly a week, a spotted dove has been frequenting our backyard garden, verandah and neighbour's terrace and krukrooling - obviously making a vocal proclamation announcing its territory. This became clear when I noticed a pair of spotted doves in our neighbour's backyard.

On January 3rd, a male dove appeared in the verandah and after conducting a survey of the area for a convenient site for nesting, vocalised for some time. It reappeared on 8th with its mate and made a joint survey of the verandah roof and stayed till noon. They returned two days later carrying twigs and depositing them on the top of the fifth floor at the extreme end of the verandah. While the female bird busied itself in tidying the site and spreading the twigs, the male rested on the rafter. An hour later, they were sitting out on the parapet wall huddled together in view of the inclement weather. Puffing up their bodies, they were preening and gently rubbing each other's beak. Before departing with its mate, the female visited the nest and gave final touches to it.

The next day morning I noticed both the birds in the nest and soon after they left, I checked the nest and found one egg. The second day I found the second egg in the nest. The incubation period actually commenced from January 13th, and both the birds shared the duties of guarding and incubating alternatively. During the nights, I found only the male bird in the nest.

Eggs:

Shape, colour and numbers	..	Oval, shell-white and two numbers.
Measurements	..	Length: 2.5 cms Breadth:1.5 cms.
Position of the eggs	..	First egg NE-SW with tapering and facing NE. Second egg E-W with tapering end facing East.
Weight	..	First egg: 4.89 grams Second egg: 4.94 grams.

The change over of duties is preceded by vocalisation with courteous bowing. The moment the reliever bird lands on the parapet wall, the bird in the nest gets alerted and cocks its head with an air of expectancy. The relieved bird flies direct to the parapet wall, stretches its wings and legs and after preening for some time takes to wing. The bird in the nest occasionally changes its position.

With a view to verify whether the eggs are turned over during the incubation period, I had marked dots and + mark on both the eggs. Two days later I found both the eggs in the same position confirming that they are not turned over by either of the birds. The eggs were actually hatched on the 14th day after laying. The nest is generally kept neat and the shell pieces are discarded at a far off place.

Chicks:

Sixth day:	Eyes closed. Body covered with light brown and pale white feathers.
Seventh day:	Needle-like pale white feathers on the back, wings, tail, neck, breast and stomach.
Beak	:Steel grey.
Stomach	:Pale crimson red

Legs :Pale crimson red. Tarsus, hind, inner, middle and outer toes well developed.

Feathers :Primaries, outer and inner secondaries, lesser, median, greater and primary wing coverts developed. Vane not yet developed. Quill and rachis steel grey in colour. Pale-white needle-like feathers all over the body.

Measurements :Wings 7 cms. Tail 1½ cms. Beak 1 cm. Legs 4 cms.

Weight :First chick: 46 grams
Second chick: 47 grams

Ninth day :Vane of primary, inner and outer secondary feathers, lesser, median greater and primary wing coverts developed. Vane of the feathers on the back and rump also developed. The down feathers covering the abdomen and throat are extremely soft and fluffy. Feathers brown in colour. Length of vane of tail and outer s condaries: 1½ cms.

Fourteenth day:Length of tail feathers: 4 cms.

It is fascinating to watch the birds comm nicating with each other by repeated alternate calls, and to see the adult birds fondling the chicks by preening their breast and neck and covering them under their belly. The feeding of chicks by a process of regurgitation commenced from the **third** day and **the** frequency increased from the eighth day. Both the birds make calls near the nest to announce their arrival.

Feeding: The chicks stretch their necks and extend their beaks to reach the adult bird's beak. The adult bird inserts its upper mandible into the mouth of the chick and by a repeated process of bending and raising the neck and breast, brings the semi-digested food - white jelly-like semi-substance into its mouth and lets it into the qullet of the chick. While the adult bird is feeding one, the other chick inserts its beak from the side to draw its food. Feeding takes place in a standing position.

I had occasion to watch the female dove rushing to the nest to eject an intruding male sparrow. Two minutes later, the sparrow returned with two others to launch an attack. The female dove firmly stood guard and repulsed the attack which lasted for nearly five minutes.

The chicks, already fourteen days old, looked pretty with pale-white forehead, steel grey beak, brown feathers and pale-white fluffy down feathers. They perched on the rafter, preening, stretching their wings and legs and bowing. Having become sufficiently bold, they started probing, surveying and exploring their surroundings and indulging in make-believe take offs.

On the 17th day (February 12th) the male dove made a courtesy call and soon disappeared while the female bird repeatedly vocalised. The next day the male dove appeared and started courting by gently rubbing its back with that of its mate. I noticed intense activity in both the birds which flew from one end of the verandah to the other, traversed the entire length of the rafter, sometimes together and sometimes by turns and frequently indulged in vocalisation. It was evident that they were surveying the verandah for a possible nesting site for raising the next brood. Every time after making a rapid aerial survey, they returned to the top of the second pillar which I guessed would be the second nesting site.

The next day i.e., February13th, the male dove joined its partner at the new site and after vocalisation started courting. While the male indulged in affectionate pecking, the female lay crouched to the ground with its wing tips and tail shivering. After a hile, the male dove proceeded to the old nest, fed the chicks and rejoined the female to renew courting. Then it flew to the Neem tree and returned at 9-11 a.m., with a twig. The female got busy with nest building for raising the next brood. When the male hands over the twig, the female takes it directly in its beak, deposits and adjusts by bending the odd-shaped twigs. In 1 hr and 20 mts., the male bird made 23 sorties carrying twigs with intervals of 6, 7 and 8 minutes respectively. The female bird was busy picking the extended ends of the twigs, bending them and adjusting as fencing to prevent chicks from falling. Once or twice the male assisted the female in adjusting the twigs. After feeding the chicks, it resumed twig transportation at 11-40 a.m., and by 12-50 p.m., it made 29 trips with an interval of 11 minutes.

In the after noon when the chicks made exploratory trips, the female joined them. The male bird fed the chicks and soon after both the adult birds departed. The female bird returned in the evening, fed the chicks and flew away. One of the chicks - the bolder of the two made experimental flight and soon came down. I caught it quickly and replaced it in the nest but sometime later it flew to the Neem tree. As it was sufficiently dark, it could not be retrieved from the tree.

On 14th morning the female landed followed by the male and soon courting commenced. After some time the male bird left and the second chick came straight to the new nest. After feeding it for a couple of minutes, the female dove busied itself in completing the new nest. Every time it bent to adjust the odd shaped twigs, the second chick has been trying to reach its beak. Finding the new nest cosy and comfortable, the second chick resolved to stay put. The male resumed twig transportation at 8-47 a.m., and made 13 sorties till 10-30 a.m. By noon the new nest was completed. The second chick was not found in the evening and obviously it had left to explore the new world outside.

The next day morning I found an egg in the new nest while the old one was empty and abandoned. The female dove visited the old nest and finding it empty turned back, proceeded straight to the new nest and settled on the egg. The second egg was found on the next day. The birds went about their chores with cyclic rhythm to raise the next brood unmindful of my prying eyes.

A Favourite Mange Tree by Kunwar Suresh Singh:

My house is located on a large campus of the Institute, several hundred acres in area in Izatnagar, which is a suburb of Bareilly (U.P.). There are extensive areas under the various field crops and there are a large number of big avenue trees along the roads. Since the birds are not harrassed on the campus, plenty of bird life is seen during all the seasons of the year. The house itself has a compound about 100 m x 150 m with a large number of big trees including 7 mango trees. Two of these are rather old and are about 20-25 m tall, one on the left and the other on the right side in front of the house. They are very similar in character and possess many dead and dying branches. Though various birds perch on both the trees